

Spirit

NEWSLETTER

HONESTY · INTEGRITY · RESPECT

UNITY HOUSE OF CAYUGA COUNTY INC. EMPOWERING LIVES. SECURING FUTURES.

WINTER 2021



Looking Back in Gratitude, Looking Forward with Hope

BY KELLY BUCK, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

What catch phrases come to mind when you think of 2020? Some that immediately pop up are "unprecedented," "social distancing," "we're all in this together" and definitely "wash your hands and wear a mask!" All were certainly in our vocabulary last year as we faced a global pandemic together.

On behalf of Unity House, I must say that the word "grateful" also rose to the top for me. My heart swelled as loyal and new donors stepped forward to help the organization meet its mission in the bleakest of times. The generosity that I witnessed reflected a true coming together, a real spirit of philanthropy, that grew as the year went by and ended in a rush of donations that exceeded our hopes and goals. Even without our two largest annual fundraising events, your giving surpassed our expectations and reaffirmed our purpose.

While our friends have always supported Unity House, 2020 was different. I think people were hit where they stood by the suddenness of the viral onslaught. The unemployment rates, the economic shutdown, the food lines, the illness and death and loss – all indicated the desperate need across our nation and around the world. You heard the call and almost without even asking, you responded. Unity House has been richly rewarded, and we couldn't be more grateful for your caring support.

We understand that giving is a two-way street: we cannot receive without giving back. To that end, the agency is proud to support the communities it serves by giving as well as taking. Every holiday season, headquarters adopts a family in need through the CAP Christmas Elf program. This year, employees generously helped a single father, his three children, and their grandfather by buying presents from their wish list. One of our Ithaca program participants hosted a toy drive, another program sponsored a food collection, and some folks rang the bells for the Salvation Army. We are grateful to have the opportunity to help others in these small ways.

Together we will defeat the virus this year and move on. In the face of such tremendous loss and change, Unity House will be forever grateful for your generosity, sparked in a time of great need. We remain Unity House strong thanks to you!



Mike G. conducted a holiday toy drive in Ithaca.



Staff at headquarters adopted an Auburn family.



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Executive Director's PERSPECTIVE



Liz Smith
Executive Director

Now that we've shut the door on 2020 and are firmly into a new year, it's time to move forward collectively in healing and renewal.

One bright spot on the horizon is the rise in delivery of Covid vaccines. While developed quickly, they do hold promise for significantly reducing outbreaks and deaths around the globe. Unity House provides housing services to adults with disabilities, and as a congregate care setting, falls in Phase 1a and 1b for vaccine distribution.

I've already received my first and second doses. It was an activity that I purposely engaged in, one that sets the example and puts us on the path to recovery. Unity House is strongly urging all of its employees and service recipients to receive the shot free of charge over the coming months. We owe it to ourselves, our clients, and our fellow citizens to get this protection as soon as it becomes available.

I believe the first half of 2021 will continue to challenge us, but I remain hopeful that as more and more are vaccinated, we will turn the corner. It is my fervent wish that when summer rolls around, we will see a significant dip in cases and be able to return to some semblance of "normal" after 18 months.



During 2020, Unity House experienced a welcome surge of financial donations from both new and long-standing donors. I am so grateful for this show of support for our mission. Thanks to this generosity, the agency had the funds to spend (over \$60,000!) on some items we've never needed before, namely PPE for staff and residents, Zoom accounts, and take-out meals for our frontline employees. The latter may not seem that important, but those weekly lunches boosted staff morale more than we ever imagined. They inspired our dedicated yet fatigued employees to keep coming back to work when it was so crucially important. Those meals also provided much-needed comfort, and helped our local economy by supporting community restaurants in a bleak time.

Thank you for your vote of confidence during a difficult year. Please be well and remain hopeful.

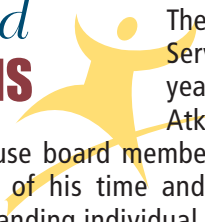
Holiday Card

Winner

Congratulations to Eric Sharpe of Self-Direction, the winner of the 12th annual holiday art contest. His artwork was used for the agency's annual holiday card.



Fred Atkins Award CALL FOR NOMINATIONS



The Fred Atkins Community Service Award is given each year in memory of Frederick J. Atkins, a beloved Cayuga

County volunteer and 30-year Unity House board member. Fred was an exemplary community servant who gave selflessly of his time and considerable accounting expertise. This award recognizes an outstanding individual who volunteers in Cayuga County and who exemplifies Fred's high moral standards and philanthropic spirit.

Unity House invites nominations for the 11th annual Fred Atkins Community Service Award. The winner will be an outstanding volunteer in Cayuga County, and will receive a \$250 reward and our deepest appreciation for giving back in the local community. Award will be presented at the agency's annual board/award dinner (date TBA).

Nominations are due Friday, April 30 by 5:00pm.

Learn more and find the nomination form here: www.unityhouse.com/fredatkins.html



Last year's Atkins Award winner Timothy Donovan and Executive Director Liz Smith.

Grants & Gifts

Unity House is the grateful recipient of funding from these sources:

Tompkins Charitable Gift Fund - \$1,860
Grant funds purchased emergency PPE for agency locations in Tompkins and Cayuga Counties. This PPE included surgical masks, gloves, air purifiers and sanitizer, in addition to the last 10 emergency PPE kits needed to fully outfit every Unity House site.

Auburn Kiwanis Club - \$650
Auburn Rotary Club - \$650
The residents of Grace House, our substance use disorder community residence, have struggled this year in the face of COVID-19. Funds were combined to purchase a large smart TV with video-conferencing capabilities so that 25+ clients may continue to participate in critically important telehealth sessions, online classes, doctor and counseling appointments, support groups, and educational meetings during the pandemic.

UH Swag Store



Unity House has partnered with The Printery in Auburn to create an online catalog for all the Unity House apparel you could ever want. They have more than 40 different options, including men's and women's shirts, jackets, hoodies, hats, vests, bags, face masks, and more! Visit: stores.inksoft.com/unityhouse/shop/home to place your order today!

Now Hiring!



Seeking meaningful employment with competitive salary and excellent benefits? Positions are open right now in Cayuga and Tompkins Counties! We have relief positions available with rates starting at \$12.50 an hour, plus part and full-time positions starting at \$13.92 an hour.

Unity House is looking for caring individuals who are interested in working with adults with mental health illnesses, developmental disabilities, and/or chemical dependencies. The agency partners with these individuals to develop their personal skills and potential, helping them to live fuller and more independent lives.

View our current job listings and complete an online application at:
unityhouse.com/joinourteam.html

Make Your Mark

Leave Your *Legacy*

The pandemic has caused many of us to think more deeply about the future: What matters most to me? How do I leave my mark after I'm gone? What choices will have the greatest impact?



Unity House has been committed to caring for individuals with disabilities for more than 40 years. Please consider Unity House in your estate planning. Your gift ensures that we can keep making life better for our most vulnerable population in the years to come.

Please speak with your attorney or financial advisor, and learn more at: www.unityhouse.com/plannedgiving.html.

Coming in 2021: an official endowment fund and a Legacy Giving Society. You will be invited to become a member! Watch for announcements this fall.

**NEED
A
SPEAKER?**

**CALL
UNITY
HOUSE!**



Is your civic organization or club seeking a guest speaker? Unity House's mission is to empower and enrich the lives of adults in recovery, coping with a mental illness, and/or those with a developmental disability. We have many staff experts who can speak to your group about what we do, who we support, and how we actively engage in our central New York communities. Visit www.unityhouse.com to learn more, then give us a call: 315-253-6227 ext. 313.

Welcome New Board Member *Kerry Barnes*

Unity House is delighted to welcome Kerry Barnes of the Tompkins County Public Library Foundation to our board. Kerry began her duties in December 2020.

"I'm looking forward to working with Kerry; I like her energy," said Executive Director Liz Smith. "Kerry has years of experience in non-profit fundraising and development, and that was an area of expertise we wished to fill on our board. Her skill sets fit nicely with our needs, and I'm sure she will bring new insight to our work."

Kerry Barnes has been the assistant director of the Tompkins County Public Library Foundation for the past three years, where she is responsible for public fundraising and development initiatives. Prior to this position, she was the director of development at both Longview retirement community and Historic Ithaca. She is an active member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Finger Lakes Chapter; serves on the TCAT advisory board; and is an annual participant in Ithaca Hospicare's highly successful Women Swimmin' fundraising event.

"I am thrilled to join the board of Unity House and support its important work," said Kerry. "As the family member of a person with developmental disabilities, I've seen first-hand the challenges they face in navigating the world and what a vital role Unity House plays in providing support, services, and advocacy in our communities. I'm so proud to have the opportunity to serve Unity House as a board member."



Lessons **LEARNED**

by Ryan Morrell, PROS Program Director

"When is the last time you did something for the first time?" This is a quote that has stuck with me since 2009 when I did my first Tough Mudder event. In August 2019, I was spontaneously laid off from a position that I held for over seven years and had to adapt quickly. For the first time in a while, I had to update my resume and begin applying for jobs. I was excited to learn that Unity House was hiring. I had collaborated with them a few times in the past and saw how they grew over the years.

I had been in my new position at Unity House for about six months when the state shutdown happened. If you had asked me a year ago how long I thought this pandemic was going to last, I would have never guessed that it would be going on eleven months later. I am thoroughly impressed at how Unity House, both its programs and as an agency, has managed during this difficult time. I was blown away at the speed with which we completed such tasks as updating policies and procedures, strategic planning, and training to adapt to the new world we are living in. It was a "first time" for all of us!

Effectively leading during times of crisis calls on the values of courage, compassion, and hope, which have been demonstrated by our agency leaders and trickled down to every employee. My lesson learned is this: be open to change, even when it is hard. This has been a year of tremendous losses of all kinds. Knowing that you're involved with an organization that values humanity, transparency, and purpose, and is as supportive and flexible as Unity House, is truly something to be grateful for. I never could have predicted losing my job or a global pandemic, but working at Unity House has shown me that as long as I am persistent, challenges can be overcome.

So, as you move through 2021, trust yourself to try new things and remember to ask yourself: "When was the last time I did something for the first time?"

As we went to print, Ryan informed Unity House that he has been hired as a firefighter for the Auburn Fire Department. He will split his time between the two positions. Congratulations, Ryan!

Why We Support Unity House

BY ANDREW AND SHOBNA CUDDY

Over ten years ago, Unity House Executive Director Liz Smith contacted me to serve on the board of directors. At the time, I was familiar with the work Unity House was engaged in at the old Case Mansion on South Street. However, I did not have an understanding of the breadth of services provided by the agency throughout central New York.

I joined the board and became very enthusiastic about the support Unity House provides for people with developmental disabilities, mental illnesses, and substance abuse challenges. Recently, with the development of the former West Middle School into an apartment complex, Unity House helped address the homeless crisis in our community.

Too often, in the comfort of our own lives, we do not see those in need around us. Unity House makes a conscious effort to identify those needs in our communities and provide solutions. Over 400 Unity House employees provide services to more than 1,000 individuals on any given day in seven CNY counties. That's real community impact.

Ten years later, I now serve as the president of the board of directors. It gives me great pride to have played a small roll in Unity House's development over this past decade. We continue to identify needs within the community and find solutions.

This past year has been particularly challenging with the COVID-19 crisis and uncertainty about the state budget, and navigating through both of these issues. Strong administrators, led by Liz Smith, are guiding the agency through this crisis, while never forgetting the individuals we serve.

For all of these reasons, my wife Shobna and I support Unity House through our volunteerism and financial donations. It is our way of "giving close to home" so we can see and feel the impact of our efforts.

Andrew Cuddy is the founder and president of Cuddy Law Firm, providing legal services to families of individuals with special needs. Andy's team has represented thousands of families in New York, Texas, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and North Carolina.



Once **AND DONE**
Consider *A Monthly Gift*

Want to make a real difference in your charitable giving? A recurring monthly gift to Unity House may be the answer! It's so easy and brings you peace of mind. Once and done.

When setting up your recurring donation at www.unityhouse.com/donate.html, you'll have the opportunity to select the amount and day your gift is processed each month. No more action needed! You can relax, knowing you're providing on-going resources to the agency all year round.



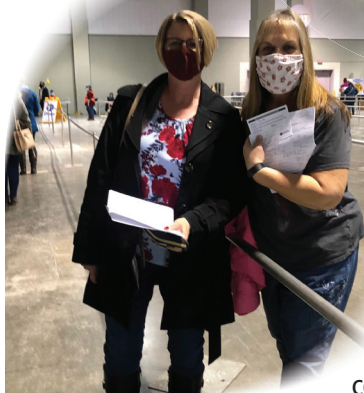


Introducing...Zoom Hab!

Covid-19 has made us get creative in providing services for our program participants. Launched in January, Zoom Hab is accessible to anyone enrolled in our day programs. Created by Shannon Engle, program manager at Ithaca WoW, Zoom Hab is an online video-based skill building group service that helps individuals continue working on their goals virtually. Some topics include financial management, socialization skills, and personal hygiene. This is just one of the many ways Unity House continues to adapt during these crazy times.

Unity House Gets Vaccinated

Unity House is committed to creating a healthy work environment for all. On February 4 and 5, small groups of nearly 40 employees and two service recipients carpooled to the OnCenter in Syracuse to get their first dose of the Moderna vaccine. Several other groups have received their shot in both Cayuga and Tompkins Counties, and we continue to urge all



employees and clients to get the vaccine to help reach herd immunity. Special thanks to COO Darlene Podolak, the Auburn Community Hospital, and local county health departments for coordinating this effort for us.

Spirit

A LITTLE PIECE OF *Nostalgia*

Did you or someone you know go to school at West Middle or West High? Do you have fond memories of your time there? Then we have a little piece of nostalgia for you! Buy a locker plaque for only \$100 and have your name held in perpetuity in West Middle School Apartments.

Email development@unityhouse.com or call 315-253-6227 x313 for details and to order. What a great way to support Unity House and be remembered in your alma matter forever!



Members of the West High School class of 1961 with their plaque

EVENT Updates

We want more than anything to host our two annual fundraisers, but it is too soon to tell how Covid-19 will continue to affect us in the future. Please stay tuned for future announcements.

Annual Dinner: The date is TBA, but will be held in the late summer or early fall.

Honoring our Award Winners: We plan to honor the winners of the Open Arms Award and the Atkins Community Service Award during our annual dinner. Nominations will be accepted through the month of April.

Art Flaire: Please keep an eye out for updates about Founders Day and Art Flaire from the City of Auburn.

YEAR-END GIVING *Success*

Unity House is so grateful for friends who supported our mission in 2020! We closed out the fiscal year with Giving Tuesday on December 1, followed by our annual phonathon on December 10. Thanks to an anonymous \$10,000 match from a very generous donor and the support of our friends, the agency raised a total of \$8,769 on Giving Tuesday and \$7,831 from the phonathon. This \$16,600 will directly impact our clients, helping them to live happy, fulfilled lives. Thank you!



STAFF Spotlights

Unity House believes it is important to recognize the achievements of its employees inside and outside of work. Congratulations to Hannah Young and Joanna Clark for their recent awards!

Dr. Hannah Young – Ithaca Rotary Club’s annual Pride of Workmanship Award

“Hannah’s resilience in navigating change, aptitude for designing and applying innovative programming, and her unflappable commitment to individuals with disabilities have provided a unique and inspiring example. Her contributions have been far-reaching in nature and help enhance the lives of individuals we support. Hannah is dedicated, determined and a true professional. I can’t imagine anyone more deserving of this award.”

Nominator Amy Santobianco, Director of Residential Services, Tompkins County

Joanna Clark – Employee of the Quarter, fall 2020

“Joanna has stepped up in so many ways to help out her Fish Road team. She comes in early, stays late, goes to other programs when asked, and is always there to help the residents or co-workers. In October, she worked hard to organize two special outings for the people we serve so that they could get out of the house and enjoy the world amid the madness of Covid-19. The first expedition Joanna planned was a scenic tour of the Adirondacks to see the fall foliage in the mountains. The second trip she planned was to Fort Stanwix near Utica so they could see a piece of history and enjoy exploring other parts of New York State. Even during challenging times, Joanna still displays a positive attitude and will always ensure the residents are comfortable and safe in their home.”

Nominator Sadi Frank, Program Manager, Fish Road IRA



Hannah Young



Joanna Clark